

OLD MAN

There are rewards for getting old. At the non-material level there is the wealth of friendship and this, for Steve, has spilled over into its opposite – finding the pinnacle of ‘the stuff’ stuff.

THE ONLY inanimate objects that really interest me are bicycles, and my friends turned the first, more abstract, perhaps spiritual, emolument into the tangible other – and presented me with a made-to-measure steel Mercer mountain bike. A birthday present!

I'm struggling a bit with the deserving aspect, mystified that: a) I have survived this long; and b) that this has qualified me for so phenomenal an acknowledgement of dubious achievement. I've ridden for years, admittedly with enthusiasm, surely passion – but doesn't everyone? I am (let's not beat about the bush) an old mountain biker – albeit with residual hard-core aspirations. My cycling friends are, on average, a generation my junior, and they can see where they're going.

Increasingly, as I ride this handsome gift, I realise what a huge leap it is from my entry-level habitat... David Mercer has threatened me with one of his bikes



A feast of friends, “Alive!” she cried.

since he shot to modest stardom in his craft, but I think it is my dear friend Carlos who was the driving force behind the whole fiendish plot to render me respectable at a higher end of technological accrument. He badgered friends and acquaintances until he had assembled new and slightly used bits-and-bobs that might be found on any self-respecting yuppie's wish list. David also contributed components and my only funding contribution was to commit my old, faithful Morsen 29er to the kitty.

We had a bit of a bash at my place when the Mercer (named, on a brass plaque under the bottom bracket, for my much-lamented trail dog Monty) was handed over. Noisy ceremony can be distracting, but I was focused to the point of preoccupation

on this unintelligible conglomeration of shiny, hand-painted steel. Including – my long-time fantasy since I rode one up the Wild Coast a couple of years ago – a Rockshox Revelation fork tweaked to 120mm of dashboard-mounted lockout control. Overwhelmed as I was, my peripheral vision was soon dutifully taken up by the full convocation of 50-odd, vociferous champions of convivial extremity (invitees and welcome gatecrashers)...

Later, I asked David for some of the thinking – because this is a thought-filled machine – behind it.

“I wanted to build a compact 29er – a hardtail that would take advantage of some of the geometry advances brought about by trail bikes of recent years and yet be comfortable. Septuagenarians are not the average target market for mountain-bike companies. Most older riders prefer a less ‘aero’ approach than younger race snakes – this more upright position is usually arrived at by the addition of headset spacers



ILLUSTRATION BY TAIURIO LOOPER

When not potting in his shed, **STEVE SHAPIRO** can be found in his natural habitat, penning award-winning poems or pondering the wisdom of the Chosen Gear.